



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Tuesday, April 7, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Category: \_\_\_\_\_

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: Joe Smith



## VACO Achievement Award Nomination 2026

Powhatan County, Virginia

Ride Assist Services and Community Matters

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**Program Title:** Ride Assist Services and Community Matters

**Category:** Transportation, Community & Economic Development, Health & Human Services, Customer Service

**Nominating Locality:** Powhatan County, Virginia

### **Program Overview**

Powhatan County respectfully submits Ride Assist Services and Community Matters for consideration as a VACO Achievement Award. These two complementary programs were created and are maintained by a Program Coordinator through the Powhatan Department of Social Services with the support of dedicated volunteers. Together, they form an innovative, community-centered approach to serving older adults by improving access to transportation, social connection, wellness opportunities, and essential resources that support aging well.

Ride Assist Services was launched at the beginning of 2020 in response to a well-documented community need. Transportation has consistently surfaced in local needs assessments as a top-tier issue, particularly for older adults. Ride Assist depends on vetted volunteers who use their personal vehicles to transport older adults to essential appointments and errands. Volunteers are reimbursed for mileage on a quarterly basis, and donor and grant funding have supported the program throughout its development.

Community Matters emerged later in 2020 as another innovative response to the needs identified through direct contact with older residents during the pandemic. What began as a way to provide safe gathering space, lunch, and social engagement during a period of



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intense isolation evolved into an ongoing program offering educational opportunities, recreation, wellness activities, and community connection. The program has continued to expand based on participant feedback and has become a trusted hub for information, engagement, and belonging.

Both programs are built on a shared principle: eligibility is not based on income. Instead, they take a broad and inclusive approach to serving older adults in Powhatan County, recognizing that the need for mobility, engagement, connection, and support cuts across economic lines. Working in tandem, Ride Assist Services and Community Matters have produced a meaningful and measurable shift in how Powhatan supports its aging population and strengthens quality of life in the community.

### **Innovation**

These programs are innovative because they address aging-related challenges through a nontraditional, relationship-based service model that is both flexible and responsive to community need. Rather than limiting assistance to income-qualified residents, Powhatan County designed these initiatives to serve older adults more broadly, recognizing that transportation barriers, social isolation, reduced independence, and lack of engaging opportunities affect seniors from all backgrounds.

### **Collaboration**

These programs are grounded in strong collaboration among county government, volunteers, local organizations, civic groups, businesses, and community partners. From



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the beginning, the Department of Social Services Program Coordinator built relationships with community civic groups, local nonprofits, business owners, and editorial staff of the local newspaper to raise awareness of the need and recruit volunteers for Ride Assist Services.

Community Matters also relies on collaboration. As gathering restrictions eased, the program grew through partnerships with county departments, community officials, professionals, and organizations that provide instruction, presentations, activities, and outreach. Participants benefit not only from the programming itself, but also from greater awareness of resources, support groups, service organizations, and opportunities available in the community.

### **Results**

Together, Ride Assist Services and Community Matters have produced meaningful results for older adults in Powhatan County.

Ride Assist Services currently serves 20 active riders and has historically served 103 total clients. The program currently operates with 9 active volunteer drivers, with 2 additional volunteers in the onboarding process. Since its inception, volunteers have driven 24,949 miles to help older adults access medical care, dental appointments, pharmacies, grocery stores, banks, community agencies, and other necessary destinations. Ride requests are coordinated and scheduled by the Program Coordinator based on volunteer availability.



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The impact of Ride Assist is best reflected in the lives it has helped stabilize. One rider remained connected to essential services while under driving restrictions following a stroke and was eventually able to regain independence and resume driving. Another rider, age 95, was able to remain in her home of more than 68 years while receiving 26 rides over 17 months to a medical facility for wound care, resulting in successful healing and discharge from treatment.

Community Matters has also demonstrated strong growth and impact. Between July 2025 and February 2026, the program served 277 unique individuals over an eight-month period. The program offers a wide range of lectures, classes, workshops, and activities, including recurring weekly and monthly opportunities focused on fitness, history, law, music, arts, science, medicine, nutrition, language, safety, recreation, wellness, and outreach.

In addition, Community Matters has served as the launch point for several other innovative efforts, including:

- Grandpals, an intergenerational pen-pal program;
- Reading is Grand, an intergenerational read-aloud program;
- Mobility Matters, a grant-funded initiative providing beach cruiser bicycles for use in the Village;
- Mobile Information Hub, a welcoming trailer stocked with community-wide information on events, organizations, practical information, and resources;
- Wellness & Active Aging events; and



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- The HumbleBee Project, now in its fifth year, which provides blankets created by participants for Children’s Hospital of Richmond.

Participants regularly report a greater sense of belonging, validation, and connection in their community. Through these programs, older adults have gained not only services and support, but trusted relationships that improve confidence, well-being, and daily life.

### **Efficiency**

These programs demonstrate efficient use of public resources through a combination of volunteerism, grant support, donor funding, and strategic county investment.

Ride Assist Services receives Federal Transit Administration Section 5310 funding through the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation for Human Services

Transportation, improving access to health care and other essential destinations. By using vetted volunteers who drive their own vehicles, the program delivers transportation support in a cost-effective manner while extending county service capacity without the need for a full-scale transit operation.

Community Matters began with grant funding that supported lunches and limited social gathering opportunities during the pandemic. After the grant period ended, the program continued through donor support and is now in its second year with a \$4,000 budget provided through County Administration. That budget is used to facilitate improved programming through professional instruction and coordinated activities. The program’s



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continued expansion demonstrates how modest public investment, when paired with strong coordination and community support, can generate substantial public benefit.

### **Community Impact**

The combined impact of Ride Assist Services and Community Matters is significant.

Together, these programs improve older adults' mental, physical, and social well-being by addressing two critical needs: access and connection.

Ride Assist Services helps older adults maintain independence, age in place, access health care, and complete essential daily tasks even when they are no longer able to drive.

Community Matters reduces isolation and promotes engagement through learning, movement, creativity, and social interaction. These services are especially important in a rural locality where transportation barriers and social isolation can significantly affect quality of life.

The programs also foster trust and belonging. Through repeated contact, relationship-building, and participant-driven programming, older adults are connected to peers, county staff, community leaders, professionals, and service organizations. This creates a stronger support network and a more age-friendly community overall.

Powhatan's older adult population represents a segment of the community experiencing significant physical, emotional, and social change. These programs recognize that the need for activity, connection, and engagement is universal. By providing inclusive opportunities not based on income, Powhatan County has brought together residents from different



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backgrounds and created common ground through service, participation, and shared experience.

### **Transferability**

Ride Assist Services and Community Matters offer a highly transferable model for other counties, especially rural localities facing growing older adult populations, limited transportation options, and increased risk of social isolation.

Other localities can replicate this model by:

- identifying unmet needs among older adults through local assessments and direct outreach,
- assigning a dedicated coordinator to build relationships and manage service delivery,
- leveraging volunteers to expand capacity,
- combining grants, donations, and modest county investment to sustain programming,
- designing services that are inclusive rather than income-restricted, and
- using participant feedback to adapt and grow programming over time.

Because these programs are practical, scalable, and rooted in community relationships, they provide a strong blueprint for other Virginia counties seeking to support aging residents in innovative and cost-effective ways.



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### **Why This Program Deserves Recognition**

Ride Assist Services and Community Matters deserve VACO Achievement Award recognition because they exemplify innovation, responsiveness, collaboration, and lasting community impact. Powhatan County identified significant needs among its older adult population and responded not with a narrow or temporary solution, but with two interconnected programs that continue to grow and evolve.

Together, these initiatives have improved access to essential transportation, reduced isolation, expanded opportunities for learning and wellness, and strengthened trust and connection among older adults in Powhatan County. They demonstrate the power of strategic partnerships, volunteerism, and thoughtful program design in addressing critical service gaps while promoting independence, well-being, and a stronger community